

Studies of homeopathic treatments need to involve both homeopaths and allopaths

Dear Sir,

I am writing in response to the article comparing allopathic and homeopathic treatments for atopic dermatitis (Can Vet J 2002;43:601–603). The scientific merit of the study is sadly lacking. Obviously, the authors are not schooled in homeopathy, nor did they consult with a classical homeopath.

Homeopathy is a system of medicine that views disease as a process affecting the patient as a whole. Medicines are applied in small nontoxic doses to treat the patient instead of just treating the disease. Allopathic treatment for cases of dermatitis attempts to suppress the itching, redness, etc. — it does not attempt to cure the dogs.

The authors' choice for a homeopathic remedy consisted of an over-the-counter mix of various remedies. The proper homeopathic treatment would have been to individualize the remedy for each dog, taking into consideration the patient as a whole, not just the skin signs. Previous treatments with suppressive drugs need to be accounted for. Homeopathic remedies should be given only on an individual, not a group, basis. For example, arsenic is actually an antidote for graphites. The dose and

frequency of remedies also need to be individualized. To use an over-the-counter product is like going to a feed dealership and using Dr. Smith's Itch Medicine as your allopathic choice.

Consideration of proper regimes of homeopathic treatment should include not only the improvement of the skin condition, but also an evaluation of the patient as a whole; for example, is the patient's well-being improved, are other signs of chronic disease improving, etc. Suppression of the clinical signs has nothing to do with curing the animal.

Hopefully, this brief response will, at least, inform readers that homeopathy is more detailed than the authors lead us to believe and, possibly, result in a classical homeopath, as well as credible allopaths, being involved in further studies.

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Response to the letters regarding the treatment of canine atopic dermatitis with a homeopathic remedy

Dear Sir,

We are delighted that so many veterinarians read and decided to comment on our article (Can Vet J 2002;43:601–603)! We are not professionally trained homeopaths, and our goal was not to validate or invalidate such individuals or their therapeutic armamentarium. However, as professionally trained practitioners of "Western medicine" — in particular the board-certified specialty of dermatology — we are constantly besieged with questions on the value of all sorts of therapeutic agents, be they "Western" or "alternative".

We have a long history of evaluating (and publishing our findings!) all sorts of "therapeutic" agents, be they traditional, standard, anecdotal, previously "validated," proprietary, or over-the-counter. The over-the-counter homeopathic remedy investigated in our study is being sold to dog owners with unsubstantiated claims of benefit for itching, allergic dermatitis, eczema, and so forth. Clearly, even the entities allegedly being benefitted are ambiguous. Virtually every disease in *Muller & Kirk's Small Animal Dermatology VI* can be associated with itching. The term of allergic dermatitis embraces several types (atopy, food, contact, insect, etc.), while eczema is a worthless term that we have been trying to eliminate from the veterinarian's vocabulary for years.

If it requires a professionally trained homeopath to find "unique differences" and prescribe "individual remedies," what hope does the dog owner have for successfully using a commercial over-the-counter product that is receiving anecdotal praise from individuals and the

media? No mention is made about the need for a professionally trained homeopath's diagnosis, the unique differences between patients, and individual remedies included with the product information.

Since "pruritus" and "allergic dermatitis" were major label claims of the commercial remedy, we decided to study our most common type of canine allergy and itching, atopic dermatitis. We designed a study in standard fashion by (1) documenting the disease in the most precise way possible, (2) giving the medicine according to a specific, standardized protocol, (3) including a placebo, and (4) making sure the responses were reproducible and sustainable. Dr. Van As does us an injustice by suggesting that we have no regard for concurrent illnesses and behavioral changes. We believe that our history taking and physical examinations are as good as most. Our patients had no other illnesses or behavioral changes.

Nowhere in our article did we "lead readers into believing" anything about homeopathy in general. We did indicate that the efficacy of homeopathic remedies in veterinary medicine is "largely unproven and quite controversial," which is accurate. Dr. Van As correctly identifies the difficulty that many of us have with homeopathy and other forms of alternative care; few, if any, controlled, interpretable studies have been published. Why shouldn't veterinarians who are engaged in alternative treatment methodologies be held to the same standards as "Westerners"? Why should it be so hard to